



ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE

finding the ways that work

## USDA announces up to \$1 billion in funding for wildlife conservation over 15 years

### What is State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE)?

This is a first-time ever opportunity for state and local government and non-profits to submit proposals to the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) to address habitat restoration and enhancement needs for high priority wildlife through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Species that could thrive on restored cropland – native bees, butterflies, grassland birds, wetland wildlife, ocelots, gopher tortoises, and many, many more animal and plant communities that are identified as at risk in State Wildlife Action Plans -- could benefit.

Applicants with successful proposals do not receive a check from USDA, but rather USDA sets aside a specific number of acres for them. Habitat restoration funding on those acres will be determined when land is enrolled and has a property-specific conservation plan. While funding is not available for staff or project monitoring, it funds the habitat improvement and restoration – and landowner payments – that are essential to many conservation projects working to protect rare wildlife.

**Does this differ from a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)?** Yes. There is no state cash match required, and proposals will be developed and funded within months.

### What would USDA pay for?

#### *Payments for land management and restoration*

- Up to 90% cost share – the cost to prepare habitat and plant vegetation for wildlife.
- 50% cost share for management, such as prescribed burns, that is required to maintain the vegetation for wildlife during the 10-15 year contract.
- Whole fields can be enrolled as well as stream and wetland buffers.

#### *Payments to the farmer's pocket:*

- Annual rental payments based on average rental rates for the 3 predominant soils on the cropland being enrolled for the length of the CRP contract (10-15 years). Nationwide, the average rental rate is \$49/ac and varies from \$27/ac to \$122/ac in state averages.
- An additional \$100/acre upfront incentive payment.

*Does not provide payments for reporting or monitoring, but will support technical assistance to help farmers plan and implement work that state agencies and private organizations may qualify for.*

*Can be combined with other funding and programs, for example to: cover the remaining 10% of restoration costs; provide additional habitat restoration dollars beyond USDA's limits; offer additional money to turn a temporary contract into a permanent easement, offer additional payments to encourage landowner participation; or any other combinations that would enhance the success of the wildlife conservation effort but not duplicate payment for the same services.*

### What land is eligible?

Only land that was in crop production 4 out of 6 years between 1996 and 2002.

### **What types of wildlife and plantings are eligible?**

Threatened and endangered species, at risk species, and other priority wildlife identified in State Wildlife Action Plans and other plans. Game species are also eligible.

### **What are the state, local, NGO and federal roles?**

USDA will be responsible for doing the paperwork to enroll farmers in contracts and for making payments to farmers. State, local, or NGO partners are responsible for finding landowners interested in participating, working with USDA to develop a conservation plan, monitoring habitat restoration or enhancement activities and compiling an annual performance report.

### **When do proposals have to be submitted?**

Soon. Proposals must be submitted to USDA in Washington, DC by November 1, 2007, but in reality, proposals must be written earlier and reviewed by state offices of USDA. Timeframes will differ by state, but it is important to start discussing your proposal idea with USDA as soon as possible to build support at the state level. USDA will likely view proposals with multiple partners as having a better chance of success at achieving their conservation goals.

### **How will the approval process work?**

All proposals need to be submitted to the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) state office by an as yet unspecified deadline. State USDA offices will identify which proposals they support and may support multiple proposals. Proposals and state recommendations are then sent to Washington, DC for final approval. Funded proposals may begin enrolling farmers as early as January 2008.

### **What should a proposal include?**

More information about what should be included in your proposal is available on the [USDA website here](#). However, we emphasize that proposals should:

- Be short, 5-10 pages.
- Include a specific goal based on the number of acres that will be enrolled over 5 years.
- Include a GIS shape file map that shows the counties, watersheds, or other regions that are targeted for farmland enrollment, and land uses and habitat types.
- Describe what will be done on enrolled acres by listing the USDA 'conservation practices' that will be used to restore habitat and if they need to be modified, describe those modifications and scientific basis for making them. Existing practices cover most habitats and activities already and are described on USDA's website.
- Describe the management needed to maintain habitat on properties during the 10-15 year enrollment period and how frequently it will need to occur.
- Include a detailed plan developed by wildlife experts to monitor the benefits the project will produce for the targeted species and how those benefits will be quantitatively measured over the 15-year lifespan of the project.
- A one page budget that estimates the USDA cost for each of its different payment types, and other in-kind and cash contributions by partners and landowners over 10-15 years.

**Environmental Defense supports this major new effort by USDA to target conservation dollars toward projects to restore rare wildlife. We have significant expertise with the implementation of the CRP program and with developing similar CREP applications and are happy to provide free guidance to any party considering developing an application to benefit rare wildlife.**

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

Terry Noto: (585) 383-0358  
[tnoto@rochester.rr.com](mailto:tnoto@rochester.rr.com)

Tim Male: (202) 572-3313  
[tmale@ed.org](mailto:tmale@ed.org)